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ADDRESS

OF

JOHN A. McCLERNAND, OF ILLINOIS, TO HIS CONSTITUENTS.



To the Voters of the Second Congressional District of Illinois:

FELLOW-CITIZENS: The certainty, now ascertained, that Congress will not adjourn in time to allow me to canvass my district in person before the election, has induced me to address you a circular, upon the subject of our official relations. This mode of communication, although not so agreeable to me, nor so favorable to the object I have in view, as that which would be afforded by free and familiar personal intercourse, will, nevertheless, I trust, prove satisfactory.

Of my early life, fellow-citizens, I scarcely need speak: it is well known to you—it was spent in your midst. An orphan in youth, I have had to encounter and overcome the wants and obstacles of orphanage. As a member of an infant community, like yourselves, I have had to endure the hardships and brave the dangers incident to the settlement of a new country; and with you I may claim to have contributed something towards the advancement of our beloved State to her present elevated and commanding position. We should all be proud, and grateful to the Almighty, that our lives and our locality are identified with the destinies of one of the most favored and promising States known to the world.

Of my public course upon the theatre of my State, it will be enough to say, that in view of its good and its bad parts, you pronounced upon the whole a judgment of approval, or at least of indulgence, by electing me to represent you in the Congress of the United States. My first election to Congress occurred in 1843, since which time you have twice reelected me to the same trust without opposition, thus affording me a grateful testimonial of your continued confidence and approbation—a testimonial which I shall ever cherish among the most sacred treasures of my heart. Lately, you have again renominated me for reelection for the fourth time; and this last nomination, if at all distinguishable from those which preceded it, should be regarded, perhaps, as the greatest compliment of all. It was made by the Democrats of my district, when I was a thousand miles distant; it was made, unsolicited by me, and, as I am informed, with entire unanimity. I doubt not that it will command the undivided support of the lion-hearted Democracy of my district, if not from considerations personal to myself, at all events from public and patriotic considerations, affecting the organization, the efficiency, and the success of the Democratic party.

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I have now, fellow-citizens, as I am informed, *opposition* to my reëlection; opposition, as I may suppose, not with the expectation of success, or with any hope of defeating me; but opposition, probably, for the purpose of rallying the Whig party, with a view to contest the Presidential election in November. Colonel MARSHALL is my opponent—a gentleman of talents and respectability—a Whig now, and always a Whig. He was a Whig candidate for elector, pledged to support Harrison and Tyler for President and Vice President of the United States, in 1840, when I was an opposing Democratic candidate for elector. He is now the Whig candidate for Congress, in opposition to myself as the Democratic candidate in the same district. It is for you, in view of all that should influence enlightened and patriotic men, to choose between us, or to choose whomsoever you may please.

When, in 1843, I took my seat in the twenty-eighth Congress, I found the Government and the country still struggling under the mal-administration of the party admitted to power by the election in 1840. The public debt and the public expenditures had been largely increased, in time of profound peace, and the credit of the Government was sunk to the lowest ebb. The work of *proscription* had been carried on from the advent of the Whig administration, and, for some time, one hundred and thirty Democrats per week were removed from office; and at the end of six months, three thousand Democrats had been removed, to make room for as many Whigs. Even while General Harrison was lying on his bier a corpse, the slaughter was continued, and James N. Barker, a Democrat, was removed from the office of Comptroller!

Other evils, of disastrous character, were inflicted upon the country by the same rulers. In the madness of ill-gotten and temporary power, the *constitutional treasury* was repealed, and the public treasure dispersed among banks and other irresponsible agents, for custody. An agrarian *distribution of the proceeds of the public lands* was enacted; an oppressive, unequal, and unjust *tariff* was established; an odious *bankrupt law* forced upon the country; and, to crown the whole scheme of abominations, one or more propositions for the establishment of a mammoth *national bank* were made, which were only defeated by the *veto* of the man who had been elected Vice President mainly by Whig votes.

Finding this to be the condition of public affairs in 1843, I applied myself, in connection with my Democratic associates, (humbly, to be sure, but zealously,) for the purpose of relieving the country from its embarrassments and afflictions: with what success, the records of Congress and the unexampled prosperity of the country will attest. Since 1843, by the persevering efforts of Democrats in Congress, and a Democratic administration, the Whig policy, to the extent it had obtained, has been overthrown, and the Democratic policy, now in happy and triumphant operation, has taken its place.

The *Constitutional Treasury* has been restored, whereby the public moneys are brought under the safe and responsible control of law. Under the operation of this simple and Republican system, ten times as much specie has been paid out of the Treasury among the people within seventeen months, as had been paid out from the Treasury before for fifty-seven years, since the organization of the Government; and a larger amount of gold and silver has been coined at the Mint, within three years, than was coined for thirty-seven years prior to 1830. Under the favorable and successful operation of this system, the Government has been enabled to negotiate large loans to meet the exigencies of war—always receiving a premium for its stocks; whereas, during the last war with Great

Britain, when the Government was connected with banks, its stocks were depreciated twenty-five per cent., payable in bank paper twenty per cent. below par. And even as late as 1841, in time of profound peace, when the extravagance of Whig rulers forced them to borrow money to meet their current expenses, the stocks of the Government were hawked about for purchasers, and could only be sold at a discount.

The *Distribution Act* has been repealed, whereby the land revenue has been reclaimed from the office of subsidizing the States, for the use of the Government. By the repeal of this measure, a prominent argument in favor of an unequal and restrictive tariff has been foiled, and the people of the new States have been relieved from the injustice and oppression of being taxed to buy more and more lands, to be sold chiefly to themselves at an advanced price, in order that the proceeds of such sales may be distributed, in the largest proportions, among the older and more populous States.

Of the *Bankrupt Law*, I need only say that it met a dishonored death by the hands of its authors. Forced into existence in defiance of public opinion, it was swept out of existence by the breath of public indignation.

The odious and unjust *Tariff* enacted by the Whigs in 1842, has been replaced by the *Revenue Tariff* of 1846. The Whig tariff of 1842 was a subtilely-devised scheme, having the effect to tax one portion of the community for the benefit of another—to tax labor for the benefit of capital—to impoverish the many who till the soil, for the benefit of the favored few who are engaged in manufacturing. Under its operation, the necessaries of life, such as are used by the poor, were taxed doubly and trebly as much as many luxuries, used only by the rich: as, for example, domestic calicoes were taxed 160 per cent., while costly silks were only taxed 42 per cent. The Democratic tariff of 1846 has remedied this injustice; it has adjusted the scale of duties on imports upon just and legitimate principles—limiting indirect taxation to the economical wants of the Government, and affording just and reasonable protection to domestic manufactures. Under its wholesome operation, the revenues of the Government have been largely increased, contrary to the predictions of its opponents; the bread-stuffs of the Mississippi valley have found a ready market in England; and the commerce of the country, notwithstanding the existence of a foreign war, was never more flourishing. Our example and our lead in the great cause of free trade have challenged the admiration and imitation of the civilized world.

Such, fellow-citizens, was the condition of the country in 1843, and such the contrast in 1848. If you wish to go back to the Whig policy of 1843; if you wish to revive political proscription—distribution—a restrictive tariff—a national bank,—your wish may be best promoted by the election of a Whig; if, on the contrary, you wish to preserve the policy now in triumphant operation, your wish may be best promoted by the election of a Democrat. Of your choice in the premises I cannot doubt: your past history for political consistency and fidelity assures me that you would be as averse to the restoration of Whig ascendancy as you are desirous to perpetuate the successes of the Democratic policy.

Upon the great questions affecting our foreign relations which have arisen within a few years past, I trust my course has been such as to command your approbation, and to comport with the honor and interests of the country. Believing our title to the whole of Oregon to be good, I insisted upon its maintenance: I so voted and so spoke. Oregon, as a portion of the North American

ment—fronting on the Pacific for seven hundred miles—watered by the Columbia—affording an overland communication within our borders between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and combining the elements of a powerful commercial marine within its northern half—was of infinite value to us; and it was with the deepest regret that I saw the treaty consummated, in consequence of the faltering of the Senate, which lost to us a large and valuable portion of the country.

In regard to Texas, my course was equally decided and explicit. I voted for and advocated the annexation of Texas, not only because I believed it to be your wish that I should do so, but also because high considerations of public faith and public policy demanded it. Texas had been ceded by us to Spain in 1819, contrary to the terms of the treaty of 1803, by which we acquired it as a part of the Louisiana territory. Good faith, therefore, required that we should reclaim it as soon as we could do so justly. Texas, too, brought under the jurisdiction of the United States an extensive and fertile country, inhabited by our brethren, adapted to the production of cotton and sugar, and giving us control of the Gulf of Mexico, from the Rio Grande to the peninsula of Florida. In offering to us her sovereignty, Texas brought to the Union a priceless jewel.

My course upon the war I presume is not altogether unfamiliar to you. After the Republic of Mexico had commenced the war, by sending a hostile army across the Rio Grande, which attacked and slaughtered American citizens on American soil, I voted to recognize the existence of the war, and to grant all the supplies which were required by the proper authorities to carry it on vigorously and successfully. During the continuance of the war, thus begun, a great and important epoch has been marked in the history of the world. It has been proved that the safest and surest reliance of a free people is not upon a standing army, but upon their own intelligence, virtue, and patriotism. It was predicted by the enemies of republicanism, when the war broke out, that we would prove ourselves unable to conduct a foreign war. But what has been the result? At the call of the Government, more than four hundred thousand men leaped from the bosom of society and offered to bear arms in the cause of their country in the distant field of danger and combat. In an almost incredibly short time our armies, composed mostly of volunteers from the peaceful walks of life, overran an empire estimated to contain two millions five hundred thousand square miles, inhabited by seven or eight millions of people, supposed by many to be impregnable from the number and strength of its natural defences. And, in the mean time, while our armies were employed, against great odds of numbers, to conquer an obstinate and willful foe, our charities were also employed to conquer the prejudices and win the affections and gratitude of the famishing masses of monarchical Europe. So grand and sublime a spectacle has never before been exhibited in the experience of the world. It will ever be my pride, as an Illinoian, that Illinoians bore an honorable and conspicuous part in these transactions. At Buena Vista, at Cerro Gordo, at Molino del Rey, at Chapultepec, and at the gates of the Mexican capital, Illinoians fought and triumphed, and by their deeds of daring and patriotism, have won for our young and noble State an imperishable renown. It is to be hoped that the war, which has contributed so much to elevate and emblazon the American name, will contribute also, in an equal degree, to regenerate the spirit and the character of lethargic Mexico.

The war with Mexico has been recently terminated by a treaty of peace,

which concedes to the United States New Mexico and California. The President, in his message of the 6th instant, thus describes these acquisitions:

"Embracing nearly ten degrees of latitude, lying adjacent to the Oregon Territory, and extending from the Pacific Ocean to the Rio Grande, a mean distance of nearly a thousand miles, it would be difficult to estimate the value of these possessions to the United States. They constitute of themselves a country large enough for a great empire, and their acquisition is second only in importance to that of Louisiana in 1803. Rich in mineral and agricultural resources, with a climate of great salubrity, they embrace the most important ports on the whole Pacific coast of the continent of North America. The possession of the ports of San Diego, Monterey, and the bay of San Francisco, will enable the United States to command the already valuable and rapidly-increasing commerce of the Pacific. The number of our whale ships alone, now employed in that sea, exceeds seven hundred, requiring more than twenty thousand seamen to navigate them; while the capital invested in this particular branch of commerce is estimated at not less than forty millions of dollars. The excellent harbors of Upper California will, under our flag, afford security and repose to our commercial marine; and American mechanics will soon furnish ready means of ship-building and repair, which are now so much wanted in that distant sea."

Besides the humble part I have borne in these great measures of national concern, I have also endeavored, and, I trust, with some success, to secure for my State and my district the benefits of such local legislation as their condition called for, and as it was proper for Congress to grant. The following routes in my district have been authorized by law since I first took my seat in Congress, viz:

A route from Equality, via Elizabethtown, to Salem, in Kentucky.

From Golconda to Metropolis City.

From Shawneetown, via Cypressville, Equality, Benton, and Nashville, to Belleville and St. Louis, in Missouri.

From Benton to Mount Vernon, via Baines's Mills, to Compton's Post Office and Spring Garden.

From Mount Vernon, via Frankfort, Marion, Vienna, and Metropolis City, to Paducah, in Kentucky.

From Equality, via Sarahsville, to Marion.

From St. Louis, in Missouri, via Belleville, Sparta, Murphysborough, Saratoga, and Vienna, to Metropolis City.

From Evansville, in Indiana, via Albion and Fairfield, to Salem.

From Paducah, in Kentucky, via Metropolis, and from Friendsville, to Albany.

All of these routes were required to be put into operation as soon as the funds of the Post Office Department would justify it; and all, or the most of them, no doubt, are now in operation. I may add, that the post offices in my district have been proportionably increased.

When I took my seat in Congress, a large quantity of mineral lands in Illinois had been reserved from sale, from a very early date, by the Government. These lands were situated, in part, in the counties of Gallatin, Hardin, and Pope, in my own district, and the remainder in and adjacent to the county of Jo Daviess, in the northern part of the State. The long-continued reservation of these lands from market, and, consequently, in a great degree, from settlement and cultivation, had proved highly detrimental to the interests of the State, and, in fact, had become a grievance, of which the State had in vain, for a long time, justly complained. In 1846, as chairman of the Committee on Public Lands

of the House, I reported a bill for the sale of these lands, which became a law, under which all of these lands have been proclaimed for sale, and a large portion of them sold to honest and meritorious tillers of the soil. I have also contributed to the passage of laws for the release to the State of the "Saline reservations" within its limits, for the survey of the unsurveyed lands in Illinois, for the adjustment of suspended preëmption claims to public lands, for the removal of the legal restriction which prohibited settlers upon the public lands from entering more than two forty-acre tracts of land, and other measures of like character, upon which it would be out of place for me to dwell here.

It has been the lot of public men, in all ages and countries, to be abused by their political opponents; and such, in a large degree, has been my lot. Individuals of the Whig party have brought charges against me, for the purpose of injuring me in the public estimation, having no foundation in truth. I have been accused of disregarding the interests of my State in not voting for the wasteful and extravagant schemes of internal improvements which have been from time to time urged upon Congress during my term of service, and which have been as often vetoed by a Democratic President. I voted against these schemes, because they were ill-judged and ill-advised; because the experience of my own State warned me against their evil consequences; because they would have contributed to plunge the country into an enormous public debt, and to burden the people with taxes; because they would have lessened our pecuniary ability to carry on the war with Mexico; and because, too, they would have opened the way for the establishment of a national bank, a high restrictive tariff, and the other enormities of the Federal creed.

But while thus opposed to wild and visionary schemes of internal improvement, I have, nevertheless, been the advocate of such just and practicable improvements as I thought were called for by the condition and interests of the country. I have advocated the establishment of a national armory in the Mississippi valley, and obtained an appropriation, by the House, for the object, which, unfortunately, failed in the Senate. I shall continue to advocate this measure, and still hope to succeed with it. I have advocated the policy of granting public lands to the States in which they lie, for the purpose of making useful public improvements and accelerating the sale and settlement of the public lands; and a bill is now pending in the House granting to the State of Illinois a quantity of land for that purpose. Should the bill as proposed to be amended become a law, provision will be made for the completion of the Central railroad, with a branch to Mount Carmel and the northern cross-road, with a branch to Alton-Works, upon which the State has already expended a large amount of money.

In regard to our great western rivers, I may appeal to the Journals of Congress to prove that I am a better friend to the object of their improvement than they who claim to be the peculiar champions of this policy. I have endeavored to keep them separated from the host of spurious adjuncts which, from time to time, have been heaped upon them, and to obtain for their improvement suitable appropriations; while it has been the uniform practice of the particular advocates of this policy to overload them with such adjuncts, whereby the whole have failed. An instance of this general fact occurred during the last session of Congress. After it had become apparent that the general bill providing for their improvement would fail in consequence of its extravagant and heterogeneous character, the Senate passed a bill providing for the improvement of the Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, and Arkansas rivers alone, thus separating them from all



unimportant objects. This bill was rejected in the House—sixty-eight Whigs voting: fifty-six for the rejection, and only twelve against it. I voted for the bill. (See House Journal, 1845-'46, page 1096.)

I have also been accused of voting against the increase of the pay of the soldiers of the Mexican war. This charge is untrue in all its parts; it is without the slightest foundation or semblance of reality. On the contrary, I may justly claim to share the authorship of the measure, for it was upon my suggestion that Governor CHAPMAN, of Alabama, first and originally moved it, as an amendment to the war bill, in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union. Upon reporting the bill to the House, the amendment, striking out *eight* and inserting *ten* dollars for the monthly pay of the soldiers, was adopted, yeas 104, nays 82. I voted in the affirmative. (See House Journal, 1845-'46, page 703.) The bill, thus amended, passed the House. The Senate afterwards struck out the ten dollars, and upon the return of the bill to the House, the vote on agreeing to the amendment of the Senate was: yeas 117, nays 50; I voting to disagree, and to retain the ten dollars. (Idem, page 805.) This was the only bill upon which any direct action was taken by Congress, on the subject of the increase of the pay of the soldiers, during that session. Subsequently, various resolutions, of mere inquiry or instruction to the Military Committee, were moved on the subject, on one of which it appears my vote is not recorded at all. On all the others I voted consistently with my previous committal.

At the next session of Congress, I brought forward a bill to increase the pay of the soldiers, and to grant to them bounties of land. Mr. RATHBUN, of New York, said that—

“He was unfortunate enough not to agree with gentlemen who were so forward in making these donations to our volunteers and this increase of pay.”

“Mr. McCLENDAR admitted that our volunteers were actuated by far higher and nobler motives than a bare regard to gain. They were impelled by a noble sense of patriotism, by a zeal to redress their country’s wrongs, and in part, too, by that spirit of adventure which so strongly marked the character of our countrymen. But would the gentleman [Mr. RATHBUN] on that account do them injustice? Would he refuse them adequate pay? Would he say that ten dollars a month was too much?”

“As to the public lands, no better disposition could possibly be made of them than to grant them, in suitable quantities, to our soldiers. Men who had risked their lives for the common defence, who had won vast territories by their valor, were entitled to have just remuneration.”
—See *Congressional Globe*, 1846-'47, pp. 202-3.

At the same session of Congress, the law was passed granting bounties of land to the soldiers, and I have only to regret that their monthly pay was not increased, for which, as I have now shown, I uniformly voted. It affords me, however, much satisfaction to be able to assure those brave and patriotic men that it is now rendered almost absolutely certain that Congress will, at the present session, allow them three months’ extra pay.

Another story sedulously circulated to injure me, as I understand, is, that I have removed from and am not a resident of my district. This story is also untrue, and should be known to be untrue by its authors. My residence and my home are now where they have been from my infancy—in my district and in your midst, where they will probably continue to be longer than may be agreeable to my slanderers and persecutors. No; my transgression is not that I have removed from the district, but in fact that I have *not* removed from it—that I am still in

the way of prurient aspirations for Congressional honors—that I am still honored by the people. That my opponents should have resorted to such unworthy arts, is a greater reproach to them than it can possibly be injury to me, in the minds of an enlightened and virtuous people.

Fellow-citizens, it may be expected of me to say something respecting the approaching election for President and Vice President of the United States. I have no hesitation to do so, and will therefore freely and frankly declare my sentiments and views upon the subject. The two great parties that have existed from an early period of the Government are again arrayed against each other in the field of political, but peaceful contest. The Whig party have nominated General Taylor and Millard Fillmore, as their candidates for President and Vice President; but the Convention that so nominated them suppressed any declaration of political principles, as was done in the nomination of General Harrison and John Tyler for the same offices. Now, as in 1840, it is the policy of the Whig party to appeal to the "generous confidence of the people," rather than to come forward in a frank and manly avowal of their principles. Now, as in 1840, the cry of "*No party*" will assail our ears wherever the Democracy are in the majority, and of "*No quarter*" wherever the Whigs are in the majority. The cry of "*No party*" is a contradiction of all political experience. There never was a Government, unless it was an absolute one, not tolerating freedom of opinion and discussion, but in which parties existed; and there never will be a free Government but in which they will exist, until the ambitious and avaricious few shall cease to strive to tyrannize over and plunder the honest and toiling masses—an Utopia never to be realized. General Taylor is a brave, a patriotic, and a distinguished man; but I am opposed to his election, for the same reasons I was opposed to the election of General Harrison in 1840, and of Mr. Clay in 1844.

The Democratic party have nominated General Cass and General Butler for President and Vice President, and have openly and manfully announced the principles upon which they nominated them. I am in favor of the election of General Cass and General Butler, because they are men of approved patriotism and statesmanship, as well as valor upon the battle-field; because they are Democrats, and will administer the Government upon Democratic principles—the same principles so gloriously illustrated by the administrations of Jefferson and Jackson—upon which our Government is founded—which have conducted it from the condition of infancy to the giant stature and strength of young and vigorous manhood—which have blessed our people with liberty, happiness, and prosperity, and have rendered us the wonder and admiration of the world. For these reasons, very generally and briefly stated, I am in favor of the election of Cass and Butler.

In conclusion, fellow-citizens, allow me to add, that whether in public or private life, I will ever ardently cherish and support the great political truths and doctrines for the advancement of which I have hitherto labored, and for the undeviating and unfaltering support of which my district and my State are so honorably distinguished. I submit my case to you, fellow-citizens, for your judgment and decision, believing that whatever that judgment and decision may be, it will be just and generous.

JOHN A. McCLEERNAND.

WASHINGTON, July 11, 1848.

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